

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1727

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJECT: DEMOCRACY FOR THAILAND AND THE ROLE OF THE PRESS
(AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON GENERAL SAWAENG SENANARONG)

1. IN A COVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, GENERAL SAWAENG SENANARONG, MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, SAID THAT THAILAND SHOULD HAVE ONE STRONG NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTY ALONG THE LINES OF THE CONGRESS PARTY IN INDIA. SAWAENG DESCRIBED THE ROLE OF THIS PARTY AS SUPPORTING A COMMON NATIONAL POLICY AND NATIONAL GOALS. SAWAENG IDENTIFIED TWO OBJECTIVES THAT ALL THAI SHOULD HAVE IN COMMON: TO DEVELOP DEMOCRACY, AND TO COPE WITH COMMUNISM. HE CRITICIZED PRESENT ELEMENTS OF THAI POLITICAL LIFE, PROBABLY ALLUDING TO THE STUDENTS, FOR GIVING EXCESSIVE CONCERN TO DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY IN THAILAND WHILE IGNORING TOTALLY THE NATIONAL OBJECTIVE OF COPING WITH COMMUNISM.

2. GENERAL SAWAENG TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WAS IMPORTANT FOR THAILAND, BUT THAT IT REQUIRED A MORE RESPONSIBLE PRESS THAN THAILAND NOW HAD. HE CRITICIZED HIS FRIENDS AMONGST THE PRESS FOR OFTEN MAKING AN UNFORTUNATE ANALOGY BETWEEN PRESS FREEDOM IN THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND. STATING THAT THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TWO SOCIETIES WERE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT, SAWAENG IMPLIED THAT IN THE THAI CONTEXT, MORE PRESS DISCIPLINE WAS NECESSARY.

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3. SAWAENG SAID THAT DEMOCRACY WAS IMPORTANT FOR THAILAND, BUT

THAT IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO DEVELOP DEMOCRACY. HE CITED THE LONG HISTORICAL PROCESS OF DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES. GENERAL SAWAENG STRESSED THAT THE INSTITUTIONS AND THE MEANS OF ACHIEVING DEMOCRACY MUST VARY, FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY, DEPENDING ON THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENT SITUATION OF EACH STATE. AMBASSADOR KINTNER ASSURED GENERAL SAWAENG THAT THE US WAS WATCHING THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN THAILAND WITH MUCH INTEREST AND THE GREATEST SYMPATHY. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WISH THE RTG EVERY SUCCESS IN THIS EFFORT TO BRING DEMOCRACY TO THAILAND.

COMMENT: GENERAL SAWAENG TOLD THE AMBASSADOR HIS JOB IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE WAS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES OF THE THAI NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, INCLUDING THE 5 YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN, FOR PRIME MINISTER SANYA. SAWAENG'S CLOSENESS TO THE PRIME MINISTER SUGGESTS HIS STATEMENT ABOUT THAILAND'S NEED 'FOR ONE STRONG NATIONAL PARTY' MIGHT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF SANYA, AS WELL.

KINTNER

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